

JRAS	Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society
Lal	Lalita-vistara, ed. S. Lefmann, 2 vols, Halle, 1902, 1908.
MCB	Mélanges chinois et bouddhiques, Bruxelles, 1931-
MPS	Das Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra, ed. E. Waldschmidt, 3 vols, Berlin, Akademie Verlag, 1950-51
MR & Ill	Minor Readings and Illustrator (= trsln of Pj I)
Mvu	Mahāvastu, ed. É. Senart, 3 vols, Paris, 1882, 1890, 1897
n(n).	note(s)
Ne	Nāgarī edition
p(p).	page(s)
PED	PTS's Pali-English Dictionary
Pkt	Prakrit
P-S	Peta-Stories (trsln of Pv-a)
PTS	Pali Text Society
RO	Rocznik Orientalistyczny
SBB	Sacred Books of the Buddhists
SBE	Sacred Books of the East
Skt	Sanskrit
s.v(v).	under the heading(s)
T	Taishō shinshū daizōkyō, ed. J. Takakusu and K. Watanabe, 55 vols, Tōkyō, 1924-29
Toev	H. Kern, Toevoegselen op 't Woordenboek van Childers, 2 parts, Amsterdam, 1916
trsln(s)	translation(s)
v.(l).	variant reading(s)
w.r.	wrong reading
WZKSO	Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Süd- und Ostasiens
ZDMG	Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft

THE THERAVĀDINS AND EAST INDIA ACCORDING TO THE CANONICAL TEXTS

The close relations between the Theravādins and east India in the seventh century A.D. are well known through the concurring testimonies of the two great Chinese travellers Hsüan-tsang and I-ching.

The former, who visited India in the second quarter of the seventh century, records their presence in Samatāṭa, that is, in the Ganges delta, where together with two thousand recluses living in more than thirty monasteries¹ they formed the Buddhist community. Unfortunately, he does not state to which school the thousand or more monks, inhabiting more than ten monasteries, belonged. He met them in the neighbouring region to the west, around the famous port of Tāmralipti from whence one could embark for Ceylon. However, it can reasonably be supposed that a good part of them, if not all, were also Theravādins.²

According to Hsüan-tsang, the northern part of east India, in particular the regions of Īraṇaparvata (around the present-day town of Monghyr)³ and Kaṇṇasavarṇa (just to the north of the Ganges delta) were, on the contrary, under the sway of the Sammatīyas.⁴

At the end of the same century, I-ching, whose information is unfortunately much too general and imprecise, declared that the Sthaviras, that is the Theravādins, were then living in east India with the other great Buddhist schools, the Mahāsāṃghikas, Mūlasarvāstivādins and Sammatīyas.⁵ This would seem to mean that none of these four main groups which then comprised the Community clearly prevailed over the others in the number of its adherents in this region, the Theravādins no more than the others.

There is no serious reason to question the information thus supplied by the two famous Chinese pilgrims, but it would be helpful to know how long the Theravādins had been settled in east India, in exactly which places, and what was the broad outline of the history of their relationship with that region.

As ill luck would have it, the historiographers of this school, who have preserved so many precious details for us about the

evolution of the Theravādin community of Ceylon in the *Dīpavamsa*, *Mahāvamsa* and *Cūḷavamsa*, remain completely silent about the events which must have stood out as landmarks in the life of the Theravādin monasteries established in other regions, particularly in east India. If learned monks residing in some of these establishments edited annals similar to those which distinguish Sinhalese Pali literature, their works have long since been lost and all memory of them obliterated.

Furthermore, while Buddhist epigraphy has furnished much precise information about the presence of various early schools in most of the Indian territory, such as Ceylon, up to the present it has remained silent with regard to east India. No document has yet been discovered which attests the presence of the Theravādins, or of any other school, in this vast region, so that, were it not for the testimonies of Hsüan-tsang and I-ching, it could be doubted that this part of India was converted to Buddhism before it was governed by the Pāla kings from the eighth century on.

We would therefore know nothing of the history of ancient Buddhism, and more particularly that of the Theravādins, in east India had the canonical texts, in Pali, Sanskrit and Chinese translation, not given us some indications. Certainly, these are few and the facts which they supply can in no way be accepted as solid historical evidence in the form in which they have reached us. However, by comparing the parallel texts belonging to different schools, Theravādin naturally, but also Sarvāstivādin, Mahīśāsaka, Dharmaguptaka and others, by examining where they agree and differ, some information can be found about the presence of Buddhist communities in that part of India at the time when these canonical texts were gradually being compiled, that is, approximately during the last four centuries B.C.

The case of Ukkala, which corresponds to the northern part of present-day Orissa, is particularly clear. While the people bearing this name and the territory they inhabited are well-known to Hindu sources, to the two great Epics and the *Purāṇas*, the early Buddhist texts preserved in Chinese translation ignore them completely as do even those which have been handed down to us in their Sanskrit original, with perhaps one exception. Conversely, the Pali suttas mention them several times, which proves that the Theravādins knew of them.

At the beginning of the famous story of the meeting between the Buddha and the two merchants Tapassu and Bhalluka in Uruvelā, shortly after the Enlightenment, the Pali version states that these two men came from Ukkala,⁶ while the Mahīśāsaka, Dharmaguptaka and Mūlasarvāstivādin versions breathe not a word about that.⁷ Only the *Mahāvastu*, which belongs to the Lokottaravādins, a branch of the Mahāsāṃghikas, contains this same detail,⁸ but this work was completed much later than the Theravādins' *Vinaya-piṭaka* and it can therefore be assumed that we have here a borrowing from the tradition which the Pali text had itself made use of much earlier. In other words, it is the story contained in the Pali *Vinaya-piṭaka* which is the oldest of our sources which have the two merchants come from the country of the Ukkalas.

Other Pali texts contain further information about these people. In the three suttas entitled *Mahācattārisaka*, *Paribbājaka* and *Upādiyamāna*,⁹ the Buddha denounces the false opinions held by the Ukkalas, who denied the moral causality on which the fruition of actions is founded. In fact, only the first of these three texts has a parallel in the sūtras of the other schools and moreover it, preserved in Chinese translation, makes no allusion to the Ukkalas.¹⁰

Consequently, of all the early schools which appeared before the beginning of the Christian era and of which we possess canonical works in their original language, Pali or Sanskrit, or in their Chinese version, that of the Theravādins is the only one to mention these people at the ancient time when these texts were composed. As we have just seen, the passages in which the Ukkalas are referred to are, even so, very few and this seems to indicate that the Theravādins still did not know that people and their country very well, that their relations with them were still recent and weak, and that the monks of this school were few in number. Perhaps also the beliefs of the Ukkalas were both too different from those of the Buddhists and too strong in the minds of those people, as is shown by the three Pali suttas mentioned above, for the monks' efforts at converting them to have had much success. This country would therefore seem to have been, for the Theravādin recluses, simply a region through which they had to pass in order to reach other more welcoming ones, a region where they

came up against the indifference of the inhabitants, though perhaps not their hostility.

As we have seen above, the Mahīśāsakas and Dharmaguptakas, with whom the Theravādins were closely allied, seem to have been completely unaware of the Ukkalas before the Christian era, if one can judge from their versions of the episode of the merchants Tapassu and Bhalluka. Since the Mahīśāsakas, from whom would later emerge the Dharmaguptakas, separated from the Theravādins towards the end of the third century B.C., the addition of the mention of the Ukkalas in the Pali version of this episode is evidently later than this date, and it can be deduced from this that the Theravādins began to be interested in these people and their country at the beginning of the second century.

It is the same for the country of the Sumbhas, Suhmas in Sanskrit, which was seemingly to be found immediately to the west and north-west of the Ganges delta, therefore to the north-west of the territory inhabited by the Ukkalas. In fact, only the Chinese version of the *Thapatayo-sutta*, belonging to the Sarvāstivādin *Samyukta-āgama*, mentions it incidentally, alongside the regions peopled by the Puṇḍras and Kaliṅgas, by the Mallas, Magadhas and Āṅgas, among the countries which were successively crossed by the two laymen Ṛṣidatta and Purāṇa in search of the Buddha.¹¹ Conversely, the Theravādins locate among the Sumbhas, more exactly in a town called Desaka, two scenes of the Blessed One's life, narrated in the *Udāyī-sutta* and the *Janapada-sutta*,¹² in which the Buddha teaches certain points of doctrine to some of his monks. This enables us to think that the Theravādins knew this region better than the adherents of other early Buddhist schools, and even that they established themselves there, notably in Desaka, during the last two centuries B.C., after they had separated from the other schools.

The town of Kajaṅgala also seems to have belonged to the Sumbhas, or at least to have adjoined their territory. It was most probably to be found, as Cunningham thought, on the site of present-day Rajmahal, formerly called Kankjōl, on the right bank of the Ganges, 85km to the east-south-east of Bhagalpur. According to the *Vinaya-piṭakas* of the Theravādins and Sarvāstivādins, it marked the eastern frontier of the Madhyadeśa, Central India as it was conceived by the Indians of antiquity.¹³ The Sarvāstivādins

are in agreement with the Theravādins in locating two scenes of the Blessed One's life there, as told in the *Indriyabhāvanā-sutta*¹⁴ and the *Mahāpaṇḍita-sutta*.¹⁵ In the one the Buddha has a discussion with a young heterodox recluse and, in the other, he praises the explanations given to the local laity by a pious Buddhist nun whose name proves that she inhabits the town in question. It can therefore be assumed that Kajaṅgala was known to the Buddhist monks from before the reign of Aśoka, under whose rule the schism which divided the Sarvāstivādins from the Theravādins occurred. At that time, this town probably marked the eastern frontier of the advance both of Buddhism and of brahmanical civilization and, if the Buddha's disciples did come there, they cannot have been many in number or their visits frequent. As for the rest, Kajaṅgala was only a small township, established in a region which was still little inhabited and barely cultivated, where the monks would have found neither many laymen to convert nor plentiful supplies.

Kaliṅga, present-day Orissa between the deltas of the Mahānadī and the Godāvarī, first appears in the final stanzas of the Pali version of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*,¹⁶ which mention the possession of one of the Buddha's canine-teeth by the king of that country. Even if none of the four versions of this sūtra preserved in Chinese translation, including that of the Dharmaguptakas, contains this verse,¹⁷ we find it again in the Sanskrit version of the same text, a version which belonged to the Mūlasarvāstivādins¹⁸ and which was completed very much later than the other five. The tradition according to which the king of the Kaliṅgas would have possessed one of the Blessed One's teeth is therefore very late, after the schism which divided the Theravādins from the Dharmaguptakas, or more exactly from the Mahīśāsakas from whom the latter emerged a little later. It is later than the end of the third century B.C. and, with all the more reason, than the reign of Aśoka who conquered the country of the Kaliṅgas and opened it up to Buddhist propaganda. Furthermore the same stanza, in both its Pali and Sanskrit versions, states that another of the Buddha's teeth was preserved 'in the town of the Gandhāras', at the other end of the Mauryan empire, which was converted to Buddhism in Aśoka's reign. Quite a considerable time, in fact several decades, must have elapsed between the

introduction of Buddhism to the Kaliṅgas and the Gandhāras, following their conquest, and the formation of the legend recorded by the stanza in question which locates sanctuaries containing particularly venerable relics in these two places.

The canonical texts, in Pali, Sanskrit and Chinese translation, contain other passages concerning the Kaliṅgas, but always in the form of legends in the very characteristic style of the Jātakas, recorded in a stupendously remote past. Some are narrated in the Pali and Chinese versions of the *Mahāgovinda-sūtra*¹⁹ as well as in the *Mahāvastu*,²⁰ others are found in the much later collections of the Jātakas²¹ properly speaking.

Apart from the final verse of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* noting the presence of one of the Buddha's canine-teeth among the Kaliṅgas according to a tradition which can scarcely go back further than the beginning of the second century B.C., this region is therefore only mentioned by the canonical texts in connection with legends situated in a fabulously remote past. Furthermore, this stanza and these legends were known to both the Theravādins and the other early schools: the verse was added to the Pali version of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* as well as to its Sanskrit one, which belonged to the Mūlasarvāstivādins; the legend of King Reṇu was inserted in the Theravādin and Dharmaguptaka versions of the *Mahāgovinda-sūtra*. Finally, no canonical text, Pali or otherwise, places the country of the Kaliṅgas in direct relation to the events of the life of the Buddha or of his great disciples; no story shows us the Blessed One or one of his monks coming to expound the Doctrine of Salvation to the Kaliṅgas, or one of the latter going to the Ganges Valley to hear their instruction.

So therefore, even in the last two centuries B.C., the Theravādins did not know that country or its inhabitants any better than did the other Buddhist schools. For the Theravādins as for the other Buddhists, the country of the Kaliṅgas was still a foreign region, where the religion of the Blessed One met with hardly any success and which merited only the setting of some legends of the Jātaka type there. We even get the impression that, for reasons of which we are unaware, the monks, to whatever school they belonged, neglected to convert its inhabitants and avoided going through it. Much later, when Hsüan-tsang

travelled through that country, he noticed a similar situation, for in his time there were very few Buddhists among the Kaliṅgas who, on the contrary, showed themselves to be very devout towards the other religions, Hinduism and Jainism.

In short, the most prominent fact illustrating the presence of Buddhism among the Kaliṅgas was that of the Blessed One's famous canine-tooth which, according to a post-canonical tradition, was said to be preserved in the capital, justly called Dantapura, 'Town of the Tooth'. The existence of this celebrated relic is confirmed by the *Cūlavamsa*, according to which it was brought to Anurādhapura, the capital of Ceylon, in the ninth year of the reign of Sirimeghavaṇṇa, that is, in 370 A.D., by a brahman woman.²² Without wishing to cast a slur on the beliefs of Sinhalese Buddhists who since then have made it one of the main objects of their homage and the palladium of their ancient kings, it is reasonable to be sceptical about the authenticity of this object. In fact, no allusion to this canine-tooth is found in the six versions (including that of the Theravādins) of the canonical account of the distribution of the Buddha's relics after the cremation of his body, an account which itself indeed appears to be based much more on legend than on history. It cannot be doubted that for many centuries the Sinhalese have revered a tooth which they attribute to the Buddha, and it can be accepted that it was brought to Ceylon in the year 370. What, however, can be doubted is that the tooth given to King Sirimeghavaṇṇa by the brahman woman was indeed the one which had been preserved in Dantapura, and there is room for much more scepticism over the origin of that canine-tooth, over its belonging to the Blessed One's body, and over the circumstances which could have brought it from the Buddha's funeral pyre to the capital of the Kaliṅgas, all matters about which only very late and highly suspect legends claim to inform us.²³

An examination of the canonical texts thus permits us to extract the following facts as to the relations between the Theravādins and east India in the last three centuries B.C. At the beginning of the third century, the small town of Kajaṅgala was the easternmost of all those where Buddhist monks, belonging to a Community still little divided by schisms, went to expound their doctrine, and perhaps they had already converted some of

of its inhabitants. A century later, the Theravādins, separated from the Sarvāstivādins and then from the Mahīśāsakas, travelled through the regions situated to the south of Kajaṅgala, the country of the Sumbhas and that of the Ukkalas. They thus followed the new communication routes connecting the middle Ganges basin, where the Blessed One had lived and where the oldest and most revered places of pilgrimage were to be found, with the ports established in the Ganges and Mahānadī deltas, from whence one could embark for southern India and Ceylon, which were soon to become the main spheres of influence of those very same Theravādins. At that time, the countries of the Sumbhas and Ukkalas were doubtless still little cultivated or urbanized, where the teaching of the Buddhist doctrine had few chances of success. The situation was worse in the country of the Kaliṅgas, to the south-west of the Mahānadī delta, since, despite the conquest which Aśoka made over it at the beginning of his reign, Buddhism was never implanted or prosperous there. However, as that region was not crossed by such important routes for the pilgrims as the countries of the Sumbhas and Ukkalas, the Buddhist monks, and notably the Theravādins, seem to have neglected it.

PARIS

ANDRÉ BAREAU

Notes

- 1 Thomas Watters, *On Yuan Chwang's Travels in India*, London, 1904, II, p. 187; T 2087, p. 927c.
- 2 *Ibid.*, II, pp. 189-90; T 2087, p. 928a.
- 3 *Ibid.*, II, p. 178; T 2087, p. 926a.
- 4 *Ibid.*, II, p. 191; T 2087, p. 928a.
- 5 J. Takakusu, *A Record of the Buddhist Religion*, Oxford, 1896, p. 7 foll.; T 2125, p. 205a-b.
- 6 Vin I 3 foll.
- 7 T 1421, p. 103a; T 1428, pp. 781c-782a; T 1450, p. 125a.
- 8 Mvu III 303.
- 9 *Mahācattārīsaka-sutta*, M III 78; *Paribbājaka-sutta*, A II 31; *Upādiyamāna-sutta*, S III 72.
- 10 T 26, p. 735b.
- 11 T 99, p. 218c; *Thapatayo-sutta*, S V 348.
- 12 *Udāyī-sutta*, S V 89; *Janapada-sutta*, S V 169.

- 13 Vin I 197; T 1435, p. 182a.
- 14 M III 298; T 99, p. 78a.
- 15 A V 54; Av-ś II 41.
- 16 D II 194.
- 17 T 1, p. 30a; T 5, p. 174c; T 6, p. 190c; T 7, p. 207c.
- 18 MPS III 450.
- 19 D II 228-36; T 1, p. 31b.
- 20 Mvu III 197-209; 361-9.
- 21 Ja II 367; III 3; 376; IV 228; V 119; 135; 144.
- 22 Mhv 37.92.
- 23 Dāṭh.